

MINUTES OF COMMUNITIES AND RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee: Councillors Mahoney (Chair), Mrs A'Barrow, Mrs Allanach, Brown (substituting for Councillor Mrs Brown), Douglas, Mrs Garcia (substituting for Councillor Eccleson) and Mrs Parker (substituting for Councillor Cade)

Officers: Mannie Ketley (Head of Corporate Resources and Chief Financial Officer), Jon Illingworth (Financial Services Manager and Deputy Chief Financial Officer), Suzanne Turner (Human Resources Manager) and Veronika Beckova (Democratic Services Officer)

In Attendance: Councillor Jerry Roodhouse, Fiona Palmer (Rugby Wellbeing Hub Manager, Coventry and Warwickshire Mind) and Suki Rai (Senior Equalities Officer, Equality and Inclusion Partnership (EQuIP))

9. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 27 June 2019 were approved and signed by the Chair.

10. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Mrs Brown, Cade, Eccleson and Leigh Hunt.

11. UNIVERSAL CREDIT – VULNERABLE CLAIMANTS

As per the Committee's recommendation on 27 June 2019, an invitation to attend the meeting on 5 September was extended to Coventry and Warwickshire Mind to provide a brief regarding the organisation's experience with Universal Credit (UC).

The aim was to provide a better understanding of issues relating to gaps in application support for vulnerable claimants with mental health issues. Upon the presentation of the evidence, the Committee would ascertain whether there was any remit for the council to address any of the reported issues by reviewing the services provided by the council staff and contracted partners.

The scope of the topic changed following a suggestion to extend the invitation to the meeting to Equality and Inclusion Partnership (EQuIP). During the discussion with Coventry and Warwickshire Mind, it was highlighted that EQuIP was experiencing issues with Universal Credit involving other vulnerable groups.

The Senior Equalities Officer informed the Committee of:

- a domestic violence case where a joint claim was initially made – any changes to the joint claim made by the victim where also reported to the perpetrator which put the victim into further danger
- a case relating to the gypsy and traveller community

As the information presented at the meeting was historical, members thanked the partners for attending the meeting and asked for a written brief evidencing local cases of vulnerable claimants experiencing issues with Universal Credit following the roll out of the 'Help to Claim' service in April 2019 to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee. It was noted that partners were not required to attend the meeting if they didn't wish to.

The Committee was informed that to date, no issues with phone applications were reported.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) Fiona Palmer (Coventry and Warwickshire Mind) and Suki Rai (EQuIP) be thanked for their attendance and information provided; and
- (2) a written brief providing evidence on local cases of vulnerable claimants experiencing issues with Universal Credit following the roll out the 'Help to Claim' service in April 2019 be submitted for consideration to the next meeting of the Committee.

12. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2019/20 QUARTER 1

The Committee had previously been requested to bring copies of the relevant Cabinet report from 2 September 2019 to the meeting.

The Financial Services Manager and Head of Corporate Resources attended the meeting to present the report and answer questions. The item was briefly introduced as per the Cabinet report and key points were highlighted.

For 2019/20, officers introduced a dashboard style summary of key variance information and performance indicators for each portfolio. The change in presentation of the council's finance and performance monitoring was introduced to ensure that the information was reported in a manner that was easy to understand and scrutinised by members of public and councillors.

During wider discussion the following questions were raised:

Appendix 3 – Performance Indicators for Quarter 1 2019/20

The Financial Services Manager and Head of Corporate Resources provided a brief response to the questions below at the meeting and agreed with the Committee that a more detailed response will be provided as part of the minutes.

Environment and Public Realm

Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting

How does Rugby Borough Council compare with other local authorities? Is data for the past two years available? How were the percentages calculated?

We collect and collate all household and municipal wastes on a monthly basis and upload all tonnage by type, service and destination to DEFRA's waste data flow portal on a quarterly basis.

2017/18 Waste Indicators for Warwickshire Authorities

Authority	Authority type	Residual household waste per household (kg/household)	Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting	Percentage of municipal waste sent to landfill	Collected household waste per person (kg)
Warwick District Council	Collection	394.9	52.3%	-	368.8
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council	Collection	491.4	42.9%	-	375.7
Rugby Borough Council	Collection	484.8	44.6%	-	376.2
North Warwickshire Borough Council	Collection	550.2	45.4%	-	437.9
Stratford-on-Avon District Council	Collection	385.7	60.3%	-	444.6
Warwickshire County Council	Disposal	495.1	51.4%	15.7%	449.8

Source: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The data update is carried out on a 'quarterly in arrears' basis meaning that at the end of September 2019, we will be uploading all waste data for Quarter 1 (April 2019 – June 2019).

Each December, Defra collate all data and published statistical datasets for all English local authorities detailing all waste collected and performance stats in relation to waste reduction recycling rates. In December 2019, DEFRA will issue this information for 2018/19 and this is the official recycling rate Rugby shall use in all communications and strategy going forward.

Percentage of local deceased processed through Rainsbrook Crematorium

What are the reasons behind the substantial drop in cremations? Are the deceased being cremated elsewhere?

The information in the RPMS system only relates to Rugby cremations and burials and excludes any data from Daventry users. The data in the table reflects the composition of processing between burial and cremation in the period.

Communities and Homes

Benefits: Average end to end time for claims (days)

The latest note for the indicator states that we allow customers as much time as required to provide the information requested. Would a deadline help or is more support from officers needed?

The decline in processing times have been noted and is a consequence of merging two services (housing options and benefits). The team has experienced increased demand due to changes in legislation and increased demand. Changes to the structure in the Community Advice and Support Team are intended to address this.

Growth and Investment

The number of new homes built within the year

How many new homes were built in 2018/19?

The 2018/19 information is currently being compiled and is expected to be available in October.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the Financial Services Team be thanked for their work; and
- (2) the Financial Services Manager and the Head of Corporate Resources be thanked for their attendance.

13. EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

The committee received a report (Part 1 – Agenda Item 5) providing an update following the light-touch review of the topic of Employee Wellbeing at a scrutiny meeting on 7 February 2019. The outcome of the light-touch review was the Committee's request for a progress report to be presented in six months' time. The Human Resources Manager and Head of Corporate Resources attended the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

Officers emphasised that the council's management was fully aware of the current situation and that there was a strong desire within the council to reduce sickness absence rates.

Return to Work Interview (RTWI)

Attached at Annex 1 to the minutes is a copy of the 'breakdown of absences of longer than one week where no Return to Work Interview was carried out' circulated at the meeting. The data presented was for 2018/19. The following additional information was provided by officers at the meeting:

- 2 forms were presently available for completion. A form revised in 2018 was currently being piloted with the manual employees. A master form, created in 2012, was in use with office staff. In due course, the revised form would be rolled out for use across the council.
- A RTWI would take place after one day of sickness.
- In 2018/19, a RTWI was not carried out for absences of longer than one week in 12 cases and for absences of less than one week in 52 cases. Attached at Annex 1 to the minutes is a breakdown of the 12 cases. The Human Resources Manager assured the Committee that in many cases, discussions were taking place with employees upon their return to work, but the paperwork had not been completed as part of the process. It was further added that this was not acceptable and was being addressed.
- In 2018/19, RTWI were completed for 87.1 per cent of absences. Between May and August 2019, the completion rates had improved. RTWI were completed for 95 per cent of absences. Management was working towards 100 per cent.

- Going forward, the intention was to move from a paper-based way of working to a digital system to ensure that any gaps in the process were monitored and addressed effectively.

Musculoskeletal Injuries at Work

Attached at Annex 2 to the minutes is a copy of the ‘breakdown of 14 cases of musculoskeletal injuries at work’ circulated at the meeting. The breakdown covers the period from July 2018 until June 2019.

Members were informed that some of the injuries listed occurred whilst at work but weren’t necessarily caused by an accident or an incident at work. Staff received starter training on manual handling and regular refreshers via courses and toolbox talks.

The Committee sought clarification regarding two cases where during the accident investigation, the cause of the injury was not identified.

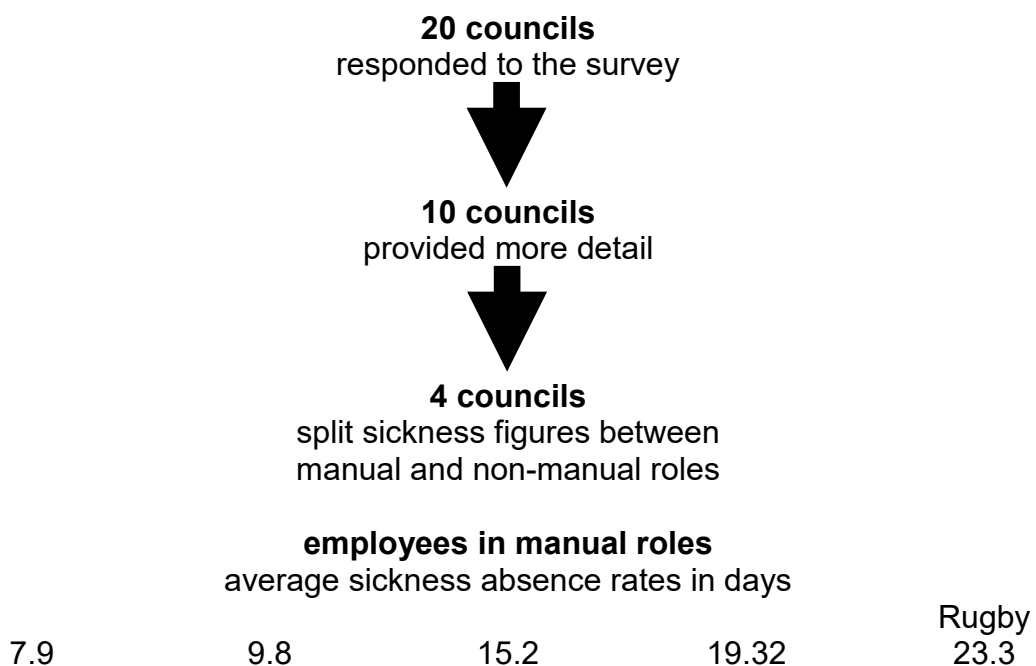
Benchmarking Sickness Absence

During the light-touch review carried out by scrutiny in February 2019, benchmarking information was requested on:

- other local authorities with a workforce similar to Rugby Borough Council i.e. with a manual workforce;
- private sector organisations such as Daventry Norse and ESPO; and
- any of the council’s contractors providing manual services to the council.

The council commissioned West Midlands Employers (WME) to carry out the work.

Some feedback was received shortly prior to the meeting of the Committee and the Human Resources Manager was able to provide a verbal update. The key points were as follows:



Presented data included short-term and long-term sickness absence. The council requested a further split of data from the WME. More information on the councils' workforce makeup was needed to ensure that Rugby Borough Council compared accurately.

The council had approximately 500 employees. The head count was different to the full time equivalent. A high percentage of the council's employees fell into the 45 to 55 and 55 to 65 age categories. The average age of an employee could be determined from the data provided at Appendix 2 of the report – Absence Reasons by Age Range.

The council's findings suggested that manual officers of a higher age were contributing to the council's sickness absence figures.

Absence Management Policy

The following paragraph formed a part of the Employee Wellbeing report presented to Brooke Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 February 2019 and was read out by the Head of Corporate Resources to provide clarification on the absence management processes in place:

'Return to work interviews are carried out for all employees who are absent due to sickness. Wherever possible, these should be completed on the first day back at work. In the case of a longer-term absence, it is best practice to carry out the return to work interview before the employee is back at work. This enables management to be confident that the employee is fit to return, can put in place under adjustments to aid their return and put into place any monitoring or review of the employee's health. These are monitored and managers are chased where return to work interview forms are not returned to Human Resources. We have the following triggers to take short term sickness cases through the formal stages of our Absence Management Policy:

- 3 or more occasions in a 6-month period
- 4 or more occasions in a 12-month period
- 8 days or more in a 12-month period

The first formal stage of our procedure is a Sickness Consultation Interview. At this meeting, the employee will usually be given a written warning that they need to improve their attendance record. Targets for future sickness absence will be set and arrangements for monitoring and review will be outlined. The employee will be encouraged to improve their health and wellbeing and managers check that they are receiving all appropriate medical advice and support.

Should the employee continue to have an unsatisfactory level of sickness absence, then the case will be escalated to a Stage 2 meeting under our policy. The format of this meeting is similar to the Sickness Consultation Interview but a final written warning will usually be given.

If the employee continues to have an unacceptable level of sickness absence, then the final stage of our policy is invoked. These stage 3 meetings are usually held with the Head of Service, as the likely sanction will be dismissal.

Our Absence Management Policy mirrors our Disciplinary Policy and Capability Policy in terms of levels of warnings and management can deal with a combination of absence, conduct and performance, together under any one of these policies.

The management of long-term sickness cases is a different process.'

The Committee was informed that written warnings were currently not issued by managers and that the reasons as to why were unclear. The advice received from WME with regards to this finding was to adhere to the policy in place and issue warnings where triggers were met.

Supplementary Data Request

During wider discussion, members requested figures for sickness absences by the following categories to be presented as part of the next progress report:

- a single day
- a Monday
- a Friday
- prior and post a bank holiday

The Chair stressed that the purpose of the report on Employee Wellbeing was to scrutinise the sickness absence processes in place, ensure that the RTWI were being completed and any injuries caused by work were being investigated, risk assessments amended as necessary and any actions arising undertaken.

The Chair emphasised that there were adequate processes and initiatives in place to address sickness absences due to mental health reasons.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the Head of Corporate Resources and the Human Resources Manager be thanked for their attendance and report; and
- (2) a covering report summarising the information presented to date on Employee Wellbeing (7 February 2019 and 5 September 2019); the supplementary data as requested by the Committee; the findings report from West Midlands Employers and the council's supporting action plan be presented at a future meeting of the Committee.

14. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report (Part 1 – Agenda Item 7) concerning the progress of Task Group reviews within its remit and the forward work programme.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the progress of scrutiny reviews be noted; and
- (2) the forward work programme be noted.

CHAIR

Absences of Longer than 1 Week where no RTWI was Carried Out 2018/19

Employee	Service	Position	Start Date: Absence	End Date: Absence	Reason for Absence	Management Action Taken	No of Calendar Days off	Comments
Employee A	C&H	Senior ICT Officer	01/06/2018	29/06/2018	Leg Pain/Injury	No RTWI	29	Discussions took place with employee about arrangements for their RTW. Employee was able to work from home and not required to travel to other locations as part of her return to work.
Employee B	C&H	Senior ICT Officer	09/07/2018	06/08/2018	Ankle/Foot Injury	No RTWI	29	RTWI completed on 4/10/18 for a second absence for the same issue
Employee C	C&H	Tenancy Sustainment Officer (Income Focused)	02/01/2019	10/01/2019	Menopause Sysmptoms	No RTWI	9	Works for two teams - could have been confusion over which manager should complete the RTWI - now clarified
Employee D	C&H	Prevention Co-ordinator	14/08/2018	03/09/2018	Depression	No RTWI	21	Employee did not return from sickness as she had a period of annual leave and then began maternity leave
Employee E	C&H	Community Advice and Support Team Officer	06/11/2018	30/11/2018	Stress	No RTWI	25	for an operation. RTWI completed on 29/11/19
Employee F	E&PR	Refuse/Recycling Service Loader	18/12/2018	31/12/2018	Chest Infection	No RTWI	14	Linked to a further absence and RTWI completed after second absence.
Employee G	E&PR	Street Cleansing Operative	01/08/2018	12/08/2018	Stomach Upset	No RTWI	12	
Employee H	E&PR	Street Cleansing Operative	11/06/2018	16/07/2018	Operation	No RTWI	36	Regular meetings with management and Mental Health First Aider
Employee I	E&PR	Refuse/Recycling Driver - LGV	05/02/2019	22/02/2019	Stress	No RTWI	18	The employee raised a greivance on returning to work and discussions took place as part of that process rather than the RTWI.
Employee J	E&PR	Management Assistant (WSU)	18/07/2018	30/07/2018	Vertigo	No RTWI	13	Manager did not carry out RTWI and this was being addressed with him
Employee J	E&PR	Management Assistant (WSU)	10/01/2019	20/01/2019	Back Pain	No RTWI	11	Discussions took place with employee about arrangements for their RTW. A DSE assessment was carried out and a new chair was provided for her.
Employee K	CR	Assistant Corporate Property Officer	11/01/2019	30/01/2019	Bereavement	No RTWI	20	Absent following bereavement. Many welfare conversations with the employee

RTWI done	474	87.1%
RTWI not Done - Absences of longer than 1 week	12	2.2%
RTWI not Done - Absences of less than 1 week	52	9.6%
No RTWI but discussion re phased RTW	2	0.4%
No RTWI but discussionre OH report	2	0.4%
Moved straight to SCI	2	0.4%
	544	100.0%

Musculoskeletal Injuries at Work July 2018 - June 2019

Service	Employee	Position	Leaving Date	Absence Reason	Absent From	Absent To	Comments
Environment and Public Realm	Employee A	Refuse/Recycling Service Loader		Ankle/Foot Injury	15/01/2019	05/04/2019	Got out of WSU cab and hurt his ankle
Corporate Resources	Employee B	Principal Accountant - Financial Planning		Broken bone	24/06/2019	Open	Fell in Council Chamber
Corporate Resources	Employee B	Principal Accountant - Financial Planning		Broken bone	28/05/2019	17/06/2019	Fell in Council Chamber
Communities and Homes	Employee C	Housing Officer		Hand/Arm Injury	28/06/2018	27/07/2018	Fell on the steps at the rear of the Town Hall when entering the building
Environment and Public Realm	Employee D	Grounds Maintenance Assistant		Hand/Arm Injury	09/11/2018	06/12/2018	Using a new pruning knife and cut hand
Environment and Public Realm	Employee E	Refuse/Recycling Service Loader		Back pain	06/06/2019	Open	Moved a heavy bin which he had been instructed not to move. Did not follow safe working practice.
Environment and Public Realm	Employee F	Gardener	01/10/2018	Back pain	20/08/2018	20/08/2018	Accident investigation completed and unable to identify how this injury happened.
Environment and Public Realm	Employee F	Gardener	01/10/2018	Back Injury	14/08/2018	16/08/2018	Accident investigation completed and unable to identify how this injury happened.
Communities and Homes	Employee G	Community Advice and Support Team Officer		Hand/Arm Injury	15/05/2018	14/10/2018	Fell in Council Chamber
Environment and Public Realm	Employee H	Grounds Maintenance Assistant		Back pain	04/12/2018	07/12/2018	Injured caused by digging out a dead sapling tree. Has an underlying health condition and is struggling with physical requirements of the role. Risk assessments and manual handling training were put in place prior to this injury happening.
Environment and Public Realm	Employee H	Grounds Maintenance Assistant		Back pain	27/11/2018	30/11/2018	As above
Environment and Public Realm	Employee H	Grounds Maintenance Assistant		Back pain	06/11/2018	09/11/2018	As above
Corporate Resources	Employee I	Property Repairs Labourer		Back pain	06/06/2019	07/06/2019	Shovelling hardcore and jarred his back
Environment and Public Realm	Employee J	Refuse/Recycling Service Loader		Back pain	08/11/2018	09/11/2018	Repeatedly moving heavy bins - refresher on manual handling provided
Environment and Public Realm	Employee K	Refuse/Recycling Service Loader		Back pain	04/10/2018	05/10/2018	Long standing back problem. Reports sustaining the injury at work several years ago.
Environment and Public Realm	Employee L	Refuse/Recycling Driver - LGV		Broken bone	09/07/2018	01/02/2019	Hit by falling bin. Received a final written warning for not following safe working practice.
Environment and Public Realm	Employee M	Refuse/Recycling Driver - LGV		Back pain	20/11/2018	23/11/2018	Refuse vehicle seat was unsuitable - now drives a different vehicle
Corporate Resources	Employee N	Property Repairs Operative		Back/Shoulder disorder	27/03/2019	Open	Unscrewing stiff bath taps and felt shoulder pain. Paid for private scan and this showed frozen shoulder.